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AUTHOR Lynch, Patrick D.
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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on Hispanic American culture in the schools of the lower Rio Bravo Valley (Texas) through impressions and descriptions of the interrelationship of school and community. School culture is defined as reflecting the shared characteristics and uniqueness of the community cultures around the school. The school cultures of the Valley are distinct as a result of historical, geographical, and social facts: political action and Hispanic empowerment; geographical remoteness; and a population of predominantly poor, lower-class Mexican Americans living in colonias (low income communities). Family values, reflected in the school, are the key to understanding the lower Rio Bravo Valley school culture: extended family (shown in the teacher-student "in loco parentis" relationship); physical contact (shown in teacher-student touching); discipline and strict authority (shown in strict adherence to zero tolerance policies); support and pride (shown in school spirit and patriotism); strong gender roles; respeto (respect) for authority; and a strong work ethic (shown in the unpaid extra time teachers devote to students and school activities). The continued use of ceremonies, sports and music programs, and scheduling of Mexican holidays and observances help bind the school and community. Common cultural ties are a part of students' lives: Tejano music, novelas (Mexican soap operas), pachangas (social gatherings) where all are included, ethnic food available in the cafeteria, use of school uniforms common in Mexico, and acceptance of the Spanish language in the schools. The schools of the Rio Bravo Valley, each possessing unique elements, have changed from being islands unrelated to the life of the colonia and Hispanic family to embracing cultural continuity. (Contains 26 references.) (SAS)

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ED 422 136

THE SCHOOL CULTURES IN THE LOWER RIO BRAVO VALLEY

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PATRICK D. LYNCH
PROFESSOR, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION,
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-PAN AMERICAN
NOVEMBER, 1997
(W) TEL: 381-3436, 381-3403
(H) TEL: 381-1710
FAX: 381-2277

What Are School Cultures?

The word "culture" implies a set of behaviors and beliefs which have deep roots in a people. Culture is a system of life-ways, ways of behaving, ways of thinking, ways of believing, and ways of relating to others. We are conditioned by the cultures in which we grew up and in which we live.

We know a culture by observing it in the behavior of other people. We are partly subconsciously and partly consciously aware of our own culture. But we can communicate enough about our own culture to socialize outsiders into the culture. The speech of people, the food they eat, the music they sing and play, the faith they hold and the rites they observe, the way they have fun, the way they treat their spouses and children, the way they perform on the job, all are part of a set of cultural patterns which make a group of people distinct. These related sets of psychological and behavioral characteristics have been used by anthropologists to describe human groups since the nineteenth century.

Cultus is a Latin word which means a cultivated plot, or a person who is a cultivator or farmer. The way people treat the land, according to the Romans, marked them as a special group. Gradually, the word cultus came to be a person who exhibited special learned behavior.

The idea of culture as a way of thinking about human groups became a conceptual tool of anthropologists in the 19th century. Bohannon and Glazer (1988) offer a simple and powerful commentary about the importance of studying culture: "The idea is a very simple one - so simple that for decades it was hard to understand. . . it is a realm of living and it is one of the systems, as is life, for giving the illusion of staving off entropy in the short run" (p. xviii). They set the study of culture in a scientific context: "Discovering culture was as important as discovering the cell.The century after 1865 or so,

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saw the beginning of professional anthropology - the emergence of people who called themselves anthropologists rather than people who simply did anthropology as an avocation, because it was an interesting and significant pursuit for a gentleman or philosopher" (pp.xviii-xix).

Tylor, Boas, Mead, Benedict, Kroeber and Kluckhohn were among the earlier writers on culture and its importance in understanding human groups. The analysis of culture marked anthropologists as a group distinct from the archaeologists, although the studies of the latter provided needed evidence for the "cultural anthropologists" from prehistory. Archaeology is in some ways A physical science as well as a social science, while cultural anthropology is more easily classified as a social science.

A powerful impetus in the American university to study culture arose from a frantic desire to observe and record what was happening to the dying life-ways of the American Indian groups in the nineteenth century. Kroeber was invited to go to Stanford in the early twentieth century to record the last gasps of the California Indian cultures, most of which became extinct in the early twentieth century (Moore, p. 70). He taught that culture was learned, shaped, patterned and meaningful (p. 73).

The values held by people in a culture can give us clues as to why people behave as they do. Bohannon and Glazer: "The history of anthropology, then, is really the history of values in the world, particularly the Western world" (p.xxi). Florence Kluckhohn is one of the most important but underused contributors to social science. In Variations in Value Orientations (1962) she identified values distinctive to five different cultures but her greatest contribution was showing that each cultural group embraces a variation as well as a modal set of values.

Notions of culture among anthropologists can be divided into those who emphasize behavior as marking culture and those who emphasize mental sets such as clusters of values and beliefs. C. Kluckhohn in Culture and Behavior (1962) and Mead in Coming of Age in Samoa (1928) saw culture as acting out. Kroeber saw culture as a mental construct which is learned (1948). Sapir put thought ahead of behavior (1968, 104-109). Similarly, Vygotsky (1978), who is not usually classified as an anthropologist, saw language as interior mental behavior shaped by the culture, with expressed language coming next as its verbal expression.

Geertz (1973) perceives the contrast between cultures as ideal or real as an erroneous contrast, because culture is a whole experience. For him culture is text, and "thick description" is the appropriate way to show how humans come to terms with universals in a special way in their own human group. The task of the observer of the culture is to try to understand the codes which are intelligible to the culture participants.

Postmodern arguments in anthropology concern the questions of whether we can know another culture and what we do with that knowledge. There was little doubt in the days of Kluckhohn and Kroeber whether another culture could be "known", because of a prevailing positivistic acceptance of the appearances of reality as representing that reality. Nor did questions of dominance and power of the observer as reasons for studying other cultures arise.

This paper is written after one person's visits to dozens of schools in the lower Rio Bravo valley. They are the impressions of one person, buttressed by the observations of many of his graduate students. These observations are what appeared to the observer with the help of the clarification of others, but may not correspond to a reality appearing to another observer. The themes of dominance and repression were not the stuff of this study but the theme of correspondence of school culture to community drove the study. School cultures themselves can be instruments of domination but descriptions of these cultures can facilitate their liberation from their roles as instruments of domination. The school cultures of the lower Rio Bravo Valley before 1970 were examples of cultural domination, repression and denial.

Educational anthropology became a distinct discipline under the influence of another Stanford professor, George Spindler, (1987). Educational anthropologists were influenced by Mead and Benedict who described the process of socialization of children into Pacific cultures. According to Benedict (1959), cultural behavior is learned and a culture is in fact a kind of school for culture. Spindler's contribution has been the concept that schools are centers of culture learning, replicating and strengthening the hold of the culture over its students; a concept now accepted as a truism. Spindler's "Why have minority groups been disadvantaged by their schools?" (1967, 1973) reveals some of his conclusions about the alienation by school bureaucracy of non-white children. The discipline is mature enough to have faculty in all the major universities of this country as well as all the appurtenances of a free-standing discipline - a national society, respected publications, annual national meetings and internal battles over its directions.

King's <u>The School at Mopass</u>, which described a school for Indian children who were inducted into Canadian society but were isolated and alienated from their own community and culture, was an early example of one of Spindler's student's work. Another of Spindler's students, Wolcott (1967), experienced the antagonism from Native American students as a teacher in their community as he tried to force them to achieve in Anglo-American fashion. He later wrote a key work in educational administration, <u>The Man (sic) in the Principal's Office</u> (1973) which was an ethnography of a person trying to make a bureaucracy work for children.

Hostetler (1963, 1971) described one group of schools which was an exception to the centers of cultural alienation so often presented in ethnographies since 1970. The Amish schools exhibit a continuity of belief and culture with their communities because their people control those schools. Trueba, et al. (1993) prescribes "cultural therapy" to heal cultural alienation between cultures in American schools.

The idea of organizational culture is a relatively recent trend in the analysis of organizations. A popular work by Peters and Waterman, In Pursuit of Excellence, stimulated thinking about the culture of organizations. Morgan (1997) has identified metaphors of organizations, one of which is organization as culture. Following the Peters and Waterman work, many writers applied the notions of culture to schools as organizations. The earlier work of Spindler saw schools as entities reflecting the culture of a group but did not see a school as a culture itself. The school as a permeable system absorbs characteristics of the cultures around it to form a distinct organizational culture. Therefore the school as culture has a uniqueness which is a compound of several cultural contributions. Just as Mead saw a person in a culture as both unique and similar to others, each school culture is a composite of the unique and the shared from the community and the society. The blend is unique and in some ways similar to others.

With the conceptual tool of organizational culture, one can identify schools as different kinds of cultures, somewhat as Peters and Waterman did with firms and as Deal (1987) has done with schools. A school as a culture has properties which make it distinct from other schools and from other non-school organizations.

The School Cultures of the Rio Bravo Valley

The cultures of the schools of the lower Rio Bravo Valley are distinct in the United States. What makes them distinct are their relationships to parents, community, and children. Each school constitutes a social unit which represents the reality which the school professionals and non-professionals have constructed with parents and the community. This reality emerges partly consciously and partly unconsciously. Because the school professionals are of the valley culture, they help build a culture which represents the reality of schooling for them. Parents and board members share in this social construction and students become part of the culture building process as they interact with teachers and administrators.

The distinctiveness of the school cultures in the lower Rio Bravo Valley is due to several historical, social and geographical factors. The first of these is easiest to describe. Prior to 1968, schools in the lower Rio Bravo Valley were much more

similar to schools elsewhere in the United States than they have been in the last years of the 20th century. The school activities, school organizations, and school boards were dominated by non-Hispanics prior to 1970. Yearbooks before that year show more graduates who were non-Hispanic than Hispanic and illustrate the presence of few Hispanic professionals and board members. The cultures of the schools at that time were indistinguishable from those of northern states or more northern parts of Texas. The exception to this statement was the cluster of districts in the western end of the valley. There was, especially in La Joya, more of a Hispanic presence in schools than in the rest of the Valley.

Among rules which were almost universal in the lower Rio Bravo Valley until 1970 were those against speaking Spanish in school buildings and classrooms, keeping Spanish-speaking students in the first grade for two years, and isolating Hispanic students either in separate buildings or in separate classrooms. There was little in the way of Hispanic-non-Hispanic student socialization. The curriculum portrayed an Anglo-Saxon America, and counselors routinely discouraged Hispanic students from attempting to attend college. Few Hispanic students were able to participate in school activities such as sports and music. Most teachers and administrators did not know Spanish nor did they attempt to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents.

San Miguel (1987) describes the desperate condition of schools for Hispanics in the Valley before 1970, and the political action required to improve it to some degree. State aid for very poor districts to build decent schools only came from the legislature in 1997 after many attempts in past legislative sessions. The aid came in the form of assistance for paying off bond issues. There has been great resistance to equitable school finance formulas for decades in Texas, because the political power has been held by those who do not want wealthy school districts to share their resources with poor, mainly Hispanic, districts.

The story of the change of student participation in school activities and the participation of Hispanics in professional and board positions requires mention of student activism in Edcouch-Elsa and Pharr. In the Edcouch-Elsa case, in 1968, several Hispanic students were expelled for walking out of classes because their petition to include them in student activities and to give space in the curriculum to Hispanic people and their achievements was ignored. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) represented the expelled students in court and won their case because due process had not been observed in their expulsion. The Supreme Court's decision in Tinker v. Des Moines in 1969 was yet to come. The La Joya School Board, led by Leo J. Leo, Sr., sent a bus to pick up the expelled students every day so they could continue their schooling in the La Joya schools and graduate on time. After the

court found for the student plaintiffs, the Edcouch-Elsa administrators moved on and the membership of the board of education changed to include more Hispanics. That event was the beginning of the change in the roles of the Hispanics in schools and on boards of education in the Rio Bravo Valley.

The student activism of the late 1960's is interesting in part because it was so uncharacteristic of Hispanic students to confront authorities until that time. Civil rights abuses were so many as to be commonplace before that time, but Hispanics of the lower Rio Bravo Valley did not demonstrate or confront, as the African Americans did in the South. Hispanic students do not carry the baggage of ethnic hatred or defensiveness. Even today, Hispanic students in the Valley are not combative when confronted with rules they dislike, such as clothing or hair rules. Hence, administrators have a much less difficult time enforcing rules in the Valley schools than do administrators of other areas of the United States.

The geographical remoteness of the Lower Rio Bravo Valley has contributed to its uniqueness in the growth of school cultures. It is a long way in physical and social distance from Dallas or Houston to Brownsville or Mission. This factor did not keep those non-Hispanics who built school cultures in the 1920's from reproducing the cultures of northern areas, but once the Hispanic people became active in school culture formation, distance protected them from having to reconstruct the cultural reality of the northern areas. Mainly, Hispanics built school cultures from what they knew and that reality was distinct.

One has to recognize that the Valley cultures are not those of San Antonio, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, and certainly not New York, even though many non-Hispanic researchers assume the Hispanic cultures of those areas to be identical. Distance allows cultures and values to remain distinct even though change is noticeable in school cultures as everyone will hasten to inform one who marvels at the order in Valley schools. The lower Rio Bravo Valley has been a rural agricultural area with very conservative values. For example, the word "chicano" is not used among Valley Hispanics to describe themselves in the 1990's. It was more commonly used in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's by people to designate themselves. It is perceived by many as an offensive word.

The overwhelming percentage of students is Hispanic, from as low as 77% in one district to 100% in a few districts. Relatively few of the students are from the middle class, with a tiny proportion from the upper income classes. The students are mainly bilingual, Spanish-and English-speaking, but may use English as a language of choice with friends. In the western part of the valley, from La Joya to Roma, Spanish dominates as the language of choice. Students are from larger families than elsewhere in Texas or the

United States. The natural population growth is larger because the population is much younger than in the rest of the state or the United States.

A large percentage of students come from colonias which are neighborhoods separated from the main town or city by some distance. A colonia is a community, usually low income, which a developer has begun on farm land. Land is much cheaper than in a city and the amount of money which a person can put down on a solar, or lot, is as low as $100. The zoning for colonias is very loose so that one can begin to build a house with a few pieces of plywood. Gradually, the family which is able to hang on to the solar improves the property until there is a simple house with a driveway, flowers, and a fence. Colonias send thousands of students to schools in the Valley and the bus rides from the colonias begin as early as 6:00 a.m. Students arrive at school an hour or more later at which time they wait for the cafeteria to open so that they can eat breakfast. After this meal they go to their classes. The long bus rides and the two free meals a day allow for extensive socialization of the students who get to know who lives where and in what kind of place.

Colonias are the places where students go home to study, if they have electricity, to bathe, if they have water, and to eat, if there is food in the house. This author has seen houses in which the only heat on a cold day is a bathtub with burning wood. Carbon monoxide poisoning does not appear to be a problem since the houses are so loosely built that the monoxide escapes through the cracks in the walls and the loosely fitting windows. These places are unbearable in the summer heat. Many colonia people cook outside all year. The wonder is that students appear neat, clean and pressed coming from these locations. Study time is difficult at best in these crowded, often unlit dwellings, so teachers try to understand that the students do what they can to comply with the homework requirements. Students from colonias often times do not have the opportunity to participate in activities after school because there are not enough buses to take them home after the activities, and their parents cannot transport them to or from school.

Many students from colonias migrate North to agricultural work. This means that they leave early from school and return the following school year. Some go to school up North but many report that they do not like the social climate in the North where they are not treated like equals. The amount of work is greater in the North and is not all field work but getting to the northern sites by auto and back is a problem, as the family car often is not dependable. The life of the colonia student is full of hardship and few interesting or pleasant breaks. School is one place where the student can expect to be treated consistently well and to have a pleasant place to work and to be with friends.

Family

The key to understanding any school culture in the lower Rio Bravo Valley is the recognition of the importance of the family. Students come from relatively large families. Children are wanted, no matter how they come or when they come. There is always someone in the extended family to care for and love a child. Many children go to live with grandparents, uncles and aunts or godparents so that those adults can avoid being lonely after their own children are gone from the house, or if the adult or couple has not had children of their own. Children who have problems in their own immediate families often go to live with other relatives or friends. In fact, one of the frustrations of the census takers is to determine where a child "belongs" or whether the child has been counted at all or more than once. A house often is home to members of two generations and sometimes three.

The school resembles an extended family in that relationships between students and teachers are more like primary relationships than secondary. Teachers who have been in the places of pupils and who know their social-family conditions have great empathy for them and treat them with almost parental care. The phrase "in loco parentis" in the Valley schools means not only a custodial relationship but in many ways an affective one, especially in elementary schools. Secondary school teachers are less apt to exhibit this affective relationship but they do exhibit care and concern for students which is beyond a professional role. Teachers hug children or pat them as they go by. Students go up to a teacher and hug a teacher. The refusal by a teacher to embrace a child who has hugged her\him is a sign to the child that the adult is cold, uncaring and possibly unfriendly. Students hug each other. In a cafeteria where I was eating with a group of fourth grade students, two boys within a few minutes turned around and gave two little girls who were passing by a big hug. One little boy said to me: "She's my sister", after he had hugged her. I had guessed as much. Students follow the custom of the Valley culture in shaking hands with anyone whom they meet. It is expected that one shakes hands with old friends or new ones at each meeting. Physical contact of any kind between teachers and students is now absolutely forbidden in any school outside the Valley. Hence, the affective climate encountered in the Valley schools is rare and strictly a product of the culture of the Valley.

Because families in the Valley are larger than families elsewhere, students are likely to be attending school with brothers and sisters. The relationships exhibited among the younger student siblings is open affection when they meet in the hallways or in the cafeteria. They are proud of each other's accomplishments and work together. One example of a family

working together is a family near La Joya from which several of the siblings have belonged to a mariachi group in high school. This group formed their own "estudiantina" and plays professionally in the valley.

Families are very faithful about attending athletic events or music events in which their children play. The athletic activities are impressive and all schools have parent nights during which the mothers and fathers are honored on the field or in the auditorium. Pictures are taken of the family group with the student in full uniform. Always, at such times, the announcers stress the importance of the gift of parents insisting on children staying in school and achieving.

At times, the student activities must give way to family obligations when a grandmother is ill and must be visited in Mexico. That assumes paramount importance. An illness, accident, or death in the extended family is assumed to be cause for the students in that extended family to attend to their family obligations. Family comes first at such crisis times. The sharing of grief among students and teachers when a student dies is most touching. There is a memorial service every year in the Mission High School which is held on the anniversary of the death of 30 students in a school bus which overturned in 1990. The family members come and the teachers and students who remember the dead students or are related to them are present for the service. The site for the memorial service is a circle of palm trees, one for every student, and a memorial plaque.

Pride in school is deep. Family members hold strong emotional attachments to the school where they and their parents or older siblings attended. High school graduations are accompanied by pachangas, or parties, in all families, in which all the extended family members and friends participate, with the students wearing formal attire. Graduation is a ceremony which is held as an almost sacred event, with none of the shouting, horseplay and irreverence which attend so many graduations in other parts of the country. Graduation is special for many families because the graduate is so often the first child of the family, or first boy or girl, to graduate. It is considered a privilege and an honor for the family to have another high school graduate. The high school valedictorians all pay special tribute to their own parents, with some of this message delivered in Spanish so that the parents and grandparents can understand clearly what the graduate is saying and communicate the feelings which the student has about the parents.

A mark of the pride with which high school graduates hold their schools is the wearing of their letter jackets by graduates while they are in at least the first two years of college in the Valley. This is something which is unheard of in colleges to the North. Alumni of the high schools attend games for many years

after graduation if they are in the area. Football games are the places where graduates meet each other. The graduates are a family in a real sense, and their high school years provide a binding for many associations in later life. People are "Cougars", "Broncos", "Bobcats", or "Javelinas" for the rest of their lives and pass on that pride to their children.

The birth rate in the Valley is quite high. Schools are being built in all districts to keep up with the number of children. The median age of the Valley population is lower than the rest of Texas and more than ten years lower than the rest of the United States. The youth of the population is evident in the teachers and administrators, as well. People get married at earlier ages in the Valley than in other parts of the country. The number of teachers being prepared is not sufficient to keep up with the demand - one of the few places in the United States where this is so. Recruiting for teachers outside the Valley goes on constantly. Young teachers have the advantage of being physically able to cope with the strenuous demands of active youngsters, so that teachers in the Valley schools do not typically have the "tired" look of so many teachers in northern areas, especially urban areas. The cultures of the schools therefore are young cultures.

Families in the Valley are dedicated to sending their children to school but many teen agers do not graduate. Many families do not yet have the role models of males who have graduated. Girls are more apt to graduate than boys and are often the first in a family to do so. Migrant students are less apt to graduate than non-migrants. Discipline in the schools is strict and students are not allowed to break the norms of clothing and appearance. Some do not have the money to keep up appearances which they covet and which are so important to adolescents. Families which insist on school attendance through high school see their children graduate, but if parents, especially the mother, does not exert enough pressure on her sons to stay with school, they may not graduate. Invariably, a high school student will answer the question "Why are you still in school?" by saying that his mother insists on it and will not let him drop out.

An interesting paradox in the dynamics of Hispanic families is the freedom allowed to male teen agers in making decisions about their future but tempered with the guidance of the mother. The mother is the patrona who wields the force of love over her children. But she also knows that she needs to allow her teen age sons to play out their male roles which are so important for later fatherhood. The choice of novias, the relationship with novias, the use of free time, whether just to be with the vatos or be in organized activities is the boy's decision. Mothers want to know where their sons are at night, and who they are moving around with, and are the ones to allow them to stay out of the house with a friend overnight, but the maturing male has a great

deal of personal freedom in decisions which mark him as independent. The teenage male Hispanic tends to identify with adults at an earlier age than non-Hispanic teens. Uncles, brothers, and friends of the family are all part of the mix of males who serve as role models for the teen ager. This of course, works for good or for bad. "Dime con quien andas y te digo quien eres" is a phrase often heard in the Valley and in Northern Mexico. "Tell me who you your close friends are, and I'll tell you what kind of person you are". Gang members pull away from their mothers' control and guidance and only with difficulty do mothers know where their sons are once they are attached to a gang.

A myth among non-Hispanics who do not know the culture is the so-called "machismo" of young and old males. True enough, the relationships between men and women, or boys and girls, is different than between genders in Anglo cultures. However, there is more similarity between Hispanic, Asian and many European cultures than between those and Anglo-American cultures with respect to gender roles. Gender roles are assumed early and are strong. It is easy to see which infants and toddlers are girls and which are boys. If Hispanics used the word "joto" routinely to refer to non-Hispanic males because of their less powerful early gender affiliation, it would be considered justly an insult. In the same way, machismo is an erroneous summary word for male Hispanic culture roles. Women are not powerless and are the center of the family. Girls in school play leading roles in all activities. The word interferes with understanding of the culture much as if we would call all southern rural people "rednecks". In the changing culture of the Valley, teen age girls now call boys on the telephone; so that boys don't have to initiate contacts for making dates. A generation ago that was unheard of as girls always waited for boys to call them. Fights in high schools between girls over boys are one of the problems counselors have to contend with.

Many colonia boys and girls belong to gangs. Gangs may be simply colonia groups without the dangerous overtones of the Valley-wide gangs, or they may be more violent aggregations with affiliates in other parts of Texas and other states. Gangs in the Valley have been growing steadily, but as yet have not extended their power into the schools as they have in cities such as Houston and New York. Boys are approached for joining gangs as early as the fifth grade and if they begin the role of "wannabes" at that time, they are steadily led into more important gang roles. By the time the boy is a seventh grader, he is a gang member, or at least ready for initiation. Every male in a school knows who some gang members are and what gangs, with their signs, they belong to. They know also that getting into a fight with a gang member will be personally costly. Gangs bring drugs into schools, sell drugs and use drugs. However the frequency of the drug incidents is not as extensive as in larger cities and gang members tend to

drop out of school by the time they are eleventh graders. Middle school and early high school years are the periods of time when the gang members attend school.

The strict authority exercised in most middle schools and high schools is a sign that adults, not gang members, are in control. Zero tolerance policies for possession of drugs, weapons of any kind, gang indicia on clothing, fights, and use of foul language are met with suspension and with repeated incidents, expulsion. Very few students are prone to call lawyers for help with suspensions or expulsions. The ACLU is not a powerful presence in the Valley, so people in the Valley are not used to rattling that chain. If one observes a cafeteria or corridor in the Valley schools, one is impressed with how orderly the scene is. Adults are not bumped into, and if one addresses a student, he is likely to be addressed as "sir". In spite of the impression held by Valley teachers that the present is a time of much more challenge to order from students than in the past, the social climate of Valley schools is very calm and respectful compared to most high schools outside of the Valley.

Respeto

Two principals have told me that if there is not a climate of respeto for children and for teachers in the school, that no learning can take place and that much of what the school tries to do would be impossible. What is this? It is much more than "respect" although it includes that. It is more a term which means that one treats another with dignity and care. One always assumes that the person to whom one is talking merits this relationship.

Adults in schools are all called by the title "Ms." or "Sir". Children address adults that way in stores or anywhere there is a meeting of the two. Children are also addressed as "Miss" or "Sir". Any teacher who has the responsibility for physical education or sports of any kind in any school, is called "coach". the climate of respeto demands that every person, including the nonprofessionals, be treated with the same care that teachers are. The social bond between student and teacher, while highly affective, is based on respeto.

As part of respeto, put-downs or angry denunciation of another, whether an adult or student, are simply not part of the culture. Blowing one's stack at a student is not allowed under the rubric of respeto. I have watched students get scoldings delivered in a quiet voice with the word, hijito, or son, as part of the delivery. This assures the student that while he is being corrected, he is not rejected. Students do occasionally get angry and blow off steam but that is rare. Such behavior is usually followed by a suspension. Losing one's temper is not condoned because the danger of physical fights may attend it. Students who

are being suspended or expelled are not shouted at or put down verbally, so much as told that the punishment for the infraction is such and such, with parents summoned to explain the disciplinary act.

In a climate of respeto, one can expect A hearing from a person in authority. Hispanic students who were not allowed a hearing with a board member or an administrator in 1968 were victims of a severe psychological mauling. Therefore they had to demonstrate to bear witness to their personal worth. Ignoring a student and not allowing one to present his\her side of the story is a violation of this deeply held cultural value as well as of procedural due process. The Hispanic student may not be aware of the latter, but is surely conscious of the former.

The Work Ethic

The Lower Rio Bravo Valley is still a region which has rural values. Until recently its main support was agriculture. That is still important but it is giving way to transportation, shipping, retailing, and servicing retirees or Winter Texans. As part of the rural heritage of many Valley people, the time of rising is very early. Rural people work hard and are convinced of the value of work. Valley people are dedicated to work and are loyal to employers

Teachers arrive early in the schools of the Valley, some as early as 7:00 a.m. They are not forced to come early but come so as to be there when their students come in with everything ready for them. The early time is a quiet time, treasured by teachers for their ability to work undisturbed. After dismissal time, few teachers leave when they are allowed to. Many are in their rooms until 4:30 or later. The parking lots are filled with teacher cars until late. Saturdays are often times when teachers come to help students. There are few opportunities for paying teachers for this extra time but teachers come anyway. Teachers attend games and other events in which their students appear and the teachers congratulate the students the next school day for their success. It is common for teachers to use keys for their classrooms during the summers. This is unheard of outside the valley. Teachers telephone their students and their parents after school hours to make sure they are getting their work done and to find out why they are not performing well, or to find out why they did not appear at school. Teachers tend to know their students' social-familial condition and can describe to a counselor why the student is having a hard time and not being able to concentrate. The many stories of students of poverty from broken homes, with not enough to eat, with no way to get to school activities after school hours or with no way to heat or light the house is a frequent theme told by teachers to those who ask them about their students.

Teacher unions have not yet taken hold in the Valley schools. There are units of the American Federation of Teachers and the NEA affiliate of the state. But without the state sanction to withhold work and to bargain collectively, the unions are not nearly so powerful as they are in northeastern states. There the work rules are strict concerning the amount of time a teacher may spend in the classroom and in training sessions. The author knows personally of many instances in the northeast where parents came for their scheduled conference with the teacher, only to have the teacher walk out after a few minutes, literally in mid-sentence. No overtime without compensation is the rule and it is observed strictly. This is far from the case in the Valley schools. Even though teachers are in a sellers' market, they are not disposed to organize for their contract negotiations and to threaten withholding of work. The climate for unions in the Valley schools is not favorable.

The teachers are perceived by students as being their friends and mentors, not their adversaries, as is the case in the inner city schools and the more affluent suburban schools. Many teachers and administrators in the Valley schools are Hispanic, have come up from the colonias and have been migrant workers so they know their students' backgrounds. Their expectations for the students are colored by their own history of climbing up through the same kinds of adversity they see in their students' lives. They empathize but do not excuse laziness on the part of their students. They tend to be very critical of those students who they believe are not trying hard enough to use their schooling for their future good and are too willing to drop out. They are intolerant of those who excuse the Hispanic students as not being able to "cut it".

The state-imposed TAAS tests drive the work of the schools in the lower Rio Bravo Valley. Teachers work very hard to get their students to pass the TAAS so they can ultimately graduate from high school. Teachers and administrators try every motivational device imaginable to get the students to work hard to pass the TAAS. Passing the TAAS is the high point of the year and the students and teachers together rejoice when the good news comes in. Many Schools have been cited by Texas Monthly (1996) for their excellent record in passing TAAS in spite of low socioeconomic status, miserable living conditions and being bilingual. The climate which teachers and administrators try to instill is that in spite of obstacles, the Valley students try hard to reach for excellence.

Community and Society

Tonnies (1957) contrasted the values of community (gemeinschaft) and of society (gesellschaft). Communities are marked by primary relationships, with fathers or patrons exercising diffuse leadership roles which inhere at least partly in family

positions. Kinships, neighborhood and friendship are the bonds of community (p. 42-44). The community is also marked by affective relationships between leaders and their followers, with no boundaries for the leader as one would find in the formal modern settings. Traditional roles are powerful in communities. A leader in the colonia is so because of family position, experience, knowledge, and the relationships the leader has with other leaders in other colonias or in the nearby urban center. People in colonias depend on each other for help before calling on outsiders because outside specialists cost money and money in colonias is scarce. Another mark of a community is the dependence on barter rather than money for services. It is so in colonias. Leaders in colonias are the ones who attempt to get the nearby city to pave the streets or to install water or sewage, or to keep out the latter services. When the city wishes to annex the colonia, the leaders must be dealt with.

Leadership in colonias does not follow rationalized, limited patterns but follows relational, diffuse patterns. The leader is one who can deal with the police, with the city authorities, with the school people, and the county authorities. Children growing up in a colonia and absorbing the social patterns of the group learn to relate to authority figures in ways other than formal rules, but they learn that formal rules can hurt and can be used against them. They are not connected to power so that they look for intermediaries to help them deal with school authorities when that is necessary. When a parent has to meet with the special education staff, that parent often tries to bring along a friend who knows the school people. One mother told me; "Before you went with me, I always cried after the ARD meeting because I think they were blaming me for my child's learning problems". If none is available, they accept the inevitable and tend not to question the rational basis of the rules or punishment. Los de abajo no preguntan "Por Que?". The rules of exchange of power and dependency are difficult for an observer to understand but follow a logic of the community's peculiar relationships.

Community members tend to think of rules and roles in particularistic terms, that is as givens without reasons, and with the possibility of bending them only for personal reasons, such as having a relative who understands the child to intercede for that child. The search for someone to represent the family and child is a powerful motive in the Valley schools. Secular, universalistic processes are simply rules accepted without the possibility of interpretations for personal reasons. The rules must apply equally to everyone without exception. The valley student is more used to thinking of rules as particularistic, and the intercession of someone to help as necessary to help one over the rough, unforgiving contours of the law and rules of organizations.

The ceremonies of the schools in the Valley bind community and school. Tonnies sees these as being more sacred than secular because the origins and reasons for the rites were local and understood mainly by the community members, rather than being rites which were national or societal. Ceremonies for Veterans' Day and Memorial Day in every school are events which bring in veterans to the school, linking community and school in remembrance of the sacrifices of the living and dead. In every school there is an opportunity for the children to meet veterans. The Viet Nam war in the Valley was not a time of protest against the war, but a time when the Valley again sent its finest to the armed services. A school and a street are named after a marine, Freddy Gonzalez, who was killed in that struggle, and received the Medal of Honor posthumously. A street in another city is named after another veteran of that war. When a destroyer was named for Freddy Gonzalez, the entire student body went to the commissioning ceremony in Corpus Christi.

In the high schools, Junior ROTC is a vibrant organization. The cadets carry the flag at all ceremonies, including the football games and march in the municipal parades. The esprit enkindled among this group of boys and girls is in contrast to the mean-spirited remarks of a United States senator who seeks to end funding for that organization. She claims that it fosters militarism. In the schools of the Valley there are no militarists but all the students are proud of the flag and what it stands for. Brand new students who come from Mexico in their first year join ROTC and are as enthusiastic about their flag and the national anthem as the students who have been in the Valley since birth.

Most schools in the northern parts of the United States trashed their ceremonies during the late 1960's and 1970's. In so doing they threw away much of what bound the school to the community. The secularization of the school rid the organization not only of any religious ceremonies but also of civic ceremonies. The ceremonies which are attended by adults and which are cheered on by them allow adolescents to play roles which not only entertain but are role playing for the community. At those times, the students are the most important human beings in the community and they understand the importance of straining for your folks. As the movie actor in "The Last Picture Show" portraying a dying small town in Texas says, a high school boy must be willing to be "stomped on for his home town".

Most impressive of the ceremonies are the Friday night football games. The stadia of the school districts in the valley are larger than most college stadia in this country. They are filled on game nights. Tickets are hard to obtain on Friday afternoons in most districts. The games feature an extravagant display of musicians in uniform, cheerleaders and banner carriers. Choreographers program the banner carriers for their steps to

accompany the band. The uniformed football players are only a small percentage of the student participants. Students have pep rallies in the high school before a game on Friday afternoon. Games are the times when parents get together, bring relatives, and consume lots of eats and drinks which support the band or athletic club. Cheerleaders are among the most sought-after positions in middle and high school. Girls go to cheerleader camps to be able to compete for the coveted roles.

Middle schools have a full program of football, basketball and other sports, but while they do not provide the spectacles of the high schools, they are the training grounds for the boys who will serve on the tens and elevens. Girls' teams are becoming much more important for the schools as they compete in tournament play and provide opportunities for scholarships for the girl athletes.

The music programs in the schools of the Valley are outstanding. They involve thousands of students in choral and instrumental events. Orchestras have leadership, resources and instruments which a small city symphony, beset with tight budgets, would covet. Band uniforms are tailored each year to the student who inherits the uniform, and new uniforms are available at least every four years. Competition among bands is held at the annual Pigskin Jubilee, two day-long affairs in which all the Valley bands participate. Parent booster organizations are the backbone of the community support for the band as it is for the football teams. These supporters link community and school in a common cause of making music to bring the two together.

The annual Christmas concerts, still so-called in most schools, are another important set-piece for the student musicians. These events draw large crowds. So far, school boards have not moved to abolish the name, Christmas, from the concert. Nor have most boards insisted that the games not begin with a prayer. The sacred nature of the school ceremonies is apparent as prayers are offered at graduations, games and concerts. As more Moslem students begin to attend Valley schools, it is possible that the prayers will be challenged, but so far the Moslem parents are not protesting. The sacredness of the ceremonies is not simply a matter of public prayers but in Tonnies' work is an expression of behavior which is above the mundane, set apart as a special kind of rite which has expressive rather than instrumental meaning. The sacredness also rests in the tradition of the observance. That which is traditional and has lost its rational "why" becomes a kind of play in which the actors portray something with meaning but which is explicable only if one knows the social and cultural context. The observance itself is meaningless outside the cultural context.

The context for the ceremonies in the rest of the country is gone so there is no cultural validity for the expressive rite. In that sense the Valley schools are almost living museums of cultural

acts which have a peculiar relevance for this special context. Waller (1932), the first educational sociologist, called schools "museums of virtue" and described the importance of school ceremonies as links between school and community.

The existence of the mariachi bands and estudiantinas in high schools, and folkloric dance groups in so many elementary and middle schools is a further elaboration of what has been said above. These cannot flourish outside a special cultural setting because the children who play in them simply wouldn't know how to act appropriately in one of the groups. Valley students have this music and rythymn in their blood and bones. They know about this music and how to dance in a folkloric group. The author watched a small mariachi group in a university about a hundred miles north of the valley. The students were well-intentioned but had little cultural preparation for their music. It was a strange act and it sounded completely out of place. This music has a kind of sacred role in the Valley because its origins are unknown to the people here but they know in their nerves and soul about the music and dance.

The importance of the mariachi is almost legendary only after fifteen years. One high school mariachi, the first and so far the most famous, went to France and Washington to perform. Two other high school mariachis from one district went to a national competition for All-American city and played in the wind-up of the city's presentation. Observers from the city say that the judges began to tap their feet with the mariachi music and the rest was a title for the city. Mariachi, folklorico and estudiantina groups were unheard of in Valley schools of the 1960's.

The cultural debt of the people to Mexico is expressed in other ways in schools. The Dia de Los Muertos (day of the dead) which is Halloween, is observed with Mexican food and sugar figures of the dead as it is in Mexico. The 16th of September, Mexico's Independence Day, the 5th of May (Cinco de Mayo), which is the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla, and the 12th of December are observed in many schools. The last is the feast of the Our Lady of Guadalupe and is a national holiday in Mexico as are the other days mentioned. Schools do not have special observances for the 12th of December but many teachers and students attend services and take part in reenactments of the story of Juan Diego on that day. American holidays are also observed, such as Thanksgiving, but with a special valley twist - the food is Mexican as well as American. The last day before Christmas vacation is observed with pageants and special lunch for parents and students. This is also a time when teachers and administrators try to ship as many food baskets as possible to the families of poor children. There are too many to take care of except for the very poorest, but the attempt is a mark of the affection the teachers have for their students. It is a tradition in the Valley to share food with

neighbors on special occasions.

The Cultural Unity of the Valley of the Rio Bravo

The Valley is a social unit which combines the northern Mexican Valley with the South Valley of Texas. Many students can identify where their families came from in Mexico, some time in the past. Even those families who are descendants of settlers from the time of the Porciones of Escandon's time, late eighteenth century, have relatives in Mexico and value the culture of Mexico very highly. The culture of Northern Mexico and Southern Texas is a unity, not divided by the river. The attempts to divide the two parts by towers, fences, and guards is only the latest in a series of anti-Mexican moves to preserve the American frontier from entry by the mojados. These go back to the nineteenth century.

Common cultural ties are a part of the students' lives. The music of the Valley is the same on both sides. Students all know the Tejano music and dance to it, either in Reynosa or in their own schools' dances. Modern Mexican entertainers are known by American children as well as Hispanic-American. The Mexican novela is much more interesting than the American soap-opera because it has a beginning, middle and end. It has a fixed life, unlike the tedious American soap operas. The lessons of the novela are that sin is punished and virtue wins out, somehow. Novela stars are much more attractive people than the plastic American types who go on and on pretending to be teenagers into their fifties. Musical themes from the novelas can be heard in the colonias and students on the bus trade the latest events of the series.

Pachangas are the pulse of the colonia. They can happen for birthdays, graduations, holidays, weddings, or any other occasion. The pachanga is an occasion for young and old to be together, to eat, to shoot baskets, to sing or listen to Tejano music. No one complains in the colonia about the noise from the pachanga because all are invited.

The food of the school cafeteria is sometimes a representation of the Valley diet. In some cafeterias, there is a special line for Mexican food. Some dishes such as tripa and menudo are not found in the cafeteria but one does encounter plenty of beans and rice, tacos and tamales. The popcorn always is sprinkled with hot salsa. Peanut butter is never seen because it is not a part of the diet of valley kids. Salads are prepared with salsa on the side. Some schools offer tortillas for the noon meal as a choice instead of bread. When there is salchicha, or sausage, it is highly appreciated, even more so than hamburgers. The diet of the school children reminds them that they and the adults of the school are of the same culture.

Visits to Mexico by students are frequent. Abuelitas in Mexico or on this side must be visited, even when this means that the school activity scheduled for the Saturday will be missed by the student. The duty of visiting abuelita is of supreme importance. Children usually talk Spanish with their abuelita and in some families, is the younger children's only Spanish-speaking experience.

The increasing use of the school uniform in the Valley elementary schools, which began in 1996, is due at least in part to the acquaintance which so many parents and students have with cousins in Mexican schools where uniforms are universal. One can buy the uniforms in Mexican stores on the border at lower prices than in American stores. One can also have them made very cheaply on the Mexican side. In 1997, one school district adopted uniforms for all students from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

One of the high points in a Valley girl's life is the quinceanera, or the fifteenth birthday. Its origins lie in the Aztec rituals of coming out for a girl ready for marriage. The ceremony of this birthday rivals a wedding in solemnity, popularity, involvement of friends and relatives and in cost. The event requires much planning and saving. Many boys who are 14 have served as chambelanes, and many girls who are 14 have served as damas for these celebrations. Girls work with their friends and cousins whenever possible during school lunch time or breakfast time to line up who the chambelanes and damas will be, what kind of dress will be worn by boys and girls, what kind of music will be played, who the sponsors will be (they pay for much of the event) and where the event will be scheduled. Some girls have the event scheduled in Mexico, even as far away as Monterrey, to take advantage of the cheaper prices for food and a hall and music, and to make it easier for the Mexican relatives and friends to come. Not all girls can afford the celebration or want to even if they can afford it. The church is becoming increasingly demanding of spiritual preparation time for the girl who wishes to use the church. Nevertheless, this celebration is one of the many ceremonies that bind child to community and its culture. For the girl who cannot be a cheerleader this is a time when she can shine brightly in her own right.

The Spanish language in schools is alive and well, in spite of efforts to kill it up until 1970. The use of Spanish by students varies by colonia or city, and by age. In colonias where Spanish is predominant, children grow up speaking the language and use it in school with other students. In the western part of the valley, and in Brownsville, a far larger proportion of students speak Spanish as their main language than in the middle of the valley. in the older colonias, children under the age of nine or ten are no longer fluent in Spanish even in families where the adolescents are fluent. When we talk about Spanish speaking, we

refer not to Castilian but to Border Spanish where many terms are invented by teenagers and are adopted by the adults later. Gang Spanish is a distinct patois, and varies by gang. Parents by and large speak Spanish so that teachers and administrators must be able to communicate with them in that language if they wish to make themselves understood. Programs in schools are often bilingual, especially if an effort to bring out parents has been made. Graduation exercises are bilingual as well. Soccer is played in Spanish, and football is played in English. Soccer players are often recent arrivals from Mexico and bring the terminology as well as their skills with them.

Every school has recently-arrived students from Mexico who are taking either bilingual education classes or English as a second language. The ESL classes in high school attempt to introduce the students into English and the school culture the first year, following Vygotsky's theory of language and culture learning going together. Students who are in the ESL classes tend to stick together the first year and later to socialize more widely in the school. The recent arrivals tend to be poor and to live with family or relatives in colonias. These students are highly esteemed by teachers because they are so well-behaved, so highly motivated to learn, so respectful of the teachers, and so eager to please. During the first few weeks they tend to stand when called upon or when another adult comes into the room, following the Mexican customs. They do their homework and try to get into school activities so as to pick up the culture as quickly as possible. They are in awe of the affluent schools which have carpets, air conditioning, cafeterias with free food, beautiful free textbooks, free bus rides, free paper and pencils, computers, movies, and technology of many other kinds. Within a year or two, however, they lose some of eagerness to please. However, they do not lose their determination to graduate and to go on to a college of some kind. Their parents and they are living witnesses to a belief in human capital formation and future orientation.

These students are determined to keep their culture intact by frequent visits to Mexico and to remain culturally Mexican no matter how well they do in school. They tend to visit Mexico nearly every weekend. They respect and love their parents but want to go farther in life than their parents did, economically. No Mexican parent who is called into school for a parent conference misses this opportunity to find out what the school expects of their child. They are used to cooperating with school authorities in the education of their children.

The colonia is a place where the new student can ease into the American side of the valley with a minimum of dislocation. The colonia is very much like the place where the student lived in Mexico, with neighborhood and kinship ties and a rythymn of celebrations and rites. The language, music, entertainment and

food is already known to the student. What is new is the changed nature of schooling in which the expectations of the student are lower than in Mexico and the risk of expulsion for failure is much less. School is easy here, say all the new students. They use the word "papitas" for the easy assignments and leisurely pace of the American school. They worry less about passing exams here than in Mexico where one either passes or gets out. The new students are much better in mathematics than the comparable American students so they have a tendency to relax after the first year.

Changes in School Cultures

The culture of the Valley school is expressive of Hispanic Valley culture combined with the demands of a society which require students to pass a state exam and to follow a state curriculum. Teachers and students cope with these external forces by attempting to use means which are culturally sanctioned and which stimulate the students to achieve the goals which their parents desire for them. The cultures of the schools described in this paper have changed greatly as the Hispanics of the Valley became empowered and much more numerous. But greater changes are on the way as the Valley moves closer to the core. Will the school cultures of the Valley become more like those of the great urban centers of San Antonio, Houston, Los Angeles or Dallas? Or will the geographic and economic position of the Valley and its proximity to Mexico preserve their uniqueness?

The schools of the Valley have changed from being islands unrelated to the life of the colonia and the Hispanic family to being a continuity, culturally. The language, ceremonies, relationships between students, parents and teachers, the constant arrival of more Mexican students all combine to create a culture that is more in harmony with the colonia and its sense of community. The key aspects of the school cultures are not only language, and community membership, but affect and above all, respeto for students and adult professionals. It is a unique set of school cultures in American society.

The tempo of change in these school cultures is affecting all of the relationships in the group. The school cultures are not what they were five or certainly ten years ago. The school cultures are probably poised now for more extensive changes, given the changing economy and social-political makeup of the Lower Rio Bravo Valley. The mix of the cultural aspects of the school must be understood to vary from school to school. What has been described is not one school, but a group of schools, with all the risk of missing distinct elements of each school. Each school possesses distinct elements but what has been described is a kind of modality for the schools of the lower Rio Bravo valley. These school cultures help the student to realize the self-esteem

so necessary for anyone at any time. They are worthy of much more attention and study because of their uniqueness and value.

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